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Tom Ziemba gives TIME's take on the home builders deal

By **Evan Brown**Category: [Governor](#), [Local](#)Tags: [Janet Napolitano](#), [Connie Wilhelm](#), [Tom Ziemba](#)

Tom Ziemba, partner in the political consulting group Ziemba Wade and member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy (TIME) Coalition, doesn't get what's unethical about the deal reached between TIME and the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona (HBACA) to gain their support for a transportation initiative.

"This is a tempest in a teapot," Ziemba told *PolitickerAZ.com*. "Folks who write initiatives do this all the time, try to get the support of stakeholder groups. That's how you run campaigns.

"Frankly," he said, "I'm a little bit perplexed with all the interest in this."

The interest began when the East Valley Tribune [revealed a memo from HBACA President Connie Wilhelm](#) formalizing the agreement between her group and the TIME Coalition, and partially owes to the last-minute intervention of Gov. [Janet Napolitano's](#) office in the negotiations.

According to Ziemba, the efforts of the governor only facilitated the final outcome, which had been in the works for "weeks, if not over a month."

"It's no secret the governor was focused on this issue," said Ziemba. "I think she had been following the process of the drafting."

Ziemba said Napolitano only intervened when negotiations between TIME and the HBACA stalled for a week, after the HBACA requested some of the language in the initiative be rewritten.

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"We had a version of the initiative everyone was quite happy with. The homebuilders then came back at the last minute and said 'Please wait, we want to discuss this with you more, find another way to get at it.' We spent an entire week rewriting language, working with them. After all that effort they came back and said they'd rather do it legislatively than through an initiative."

That, said Ziemba, was what triggered the governor stepping in.

"In the end, the governor's office ended up saying, 'Where can we be helpful in pushing this over the finish line?' They helped to work out a compromise in the end, then it was ratified by Connie in that letter," said Ziemba.

The main focus of the criticism of the deal centers around one part of the compromise, where the HBACA agreed to give TIME \$100,000 toward their signature gathering. In exchange, a provision of the original draft of the measure that would have made developers subject to impact fees was struck out. That is the move that has many Republicans crying foul.

Ziemba maintains that no impropriety exists in that.

"Their financial support wasn't just sprinkled in at the end," he said. "From the very beginning, the negotiations started with us saying 'We want your political and financial support.'"

He also claims the \$100,000 was necessary to make up for the week-long delay in signature gathering caused by the HBACA's balking at the original deal.

In the end, though, Ziemba denies that any pay-for-play comparison is appropriate.

"This is not legislation, this is an initiative," he said. "This isn't the legislature, and we're not elected officials. Private citizens can include what they want and change what they want."

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